THE MAYORS' INSTITUTE ON

CITY DESIGN

Design Arts Program, National Endowment for the Arts Spring 1993

Urban Spectacular for Downtown Las Vegas

Under the leadership of Mayor Jan Laverty Jones, Las Vegas has embraced a bold idea for redesigning Fremont Street to regain business from the gambling casinos on the Strip and promote historic downtown Las Vegas.

When Mayor Jones presented Las Vegas' design issue to the Mayors' Institute on City Design in October, 1991, the resource team advised her that she had a difficult task ahead. The city wanted to revitalize the downtown area, but any new proposals would have to compete with Las Vegas Boulevard, the strip of casinos, hotels and night clubs outside the city limits. Mayor Jones initially asked the resource team, chaired by Robert Campbell, architecture critic to the *Boston Globe*, how the city could attract tourists with a well-designed gateway or entrance corridor along Fourth Street.

What Mayor Jones realized during the institute was that a new gateway would not solve her city's problems. "Identifying a gateway is not going to make someone go through it," noted the mayor. The focus of the discussion became finding a way for the city to reaffirm the vitality and importance of downtown Las Vegas. As Mayor Jones said, "moving people is not the problem. Finding a person who wants to go downtown is the problem."

In the ensuing discussion, the resource team stressed that Las Vegas could not look to a solution that would ignore or try to change the vital symbolism of the city. Terry Brooks, an architect and planner based in Washington, DC, encouraged Mayor Jones to look for "a unique and interesting design form that won't compete with what Las Vegas is, but will complement and enhance the image that the city has." She was also advised to promote dramatic lighting on the street at night, provide shade and comfort during the day, and to consider designs which would be unsuitable in other cities which don't have Las Vegas' style.

The resource team acknowledged the city's difficult situation in competing with the wealthy Strip casinos, but encouraged the mayor to sponsor a major design competition for the downtown which would produce a new attraction with Las Vegas style. The city could capitalize on the

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USCM Talk Focuses on Design in City Projects

At the winter meeting of the U. S. Conference of Mayors in Washington, DC, the Mayors' Institute sponsored its fourth alumni breakfast and presentation. Thirty mayors met to talk about urban design and hear Ken Kruckemeyer, an architect and civil engineer from Boston, talk about the aesthetics of engineering and a mayor's ability to promote quality design in public projects.

Kruckemeyer began the presentation with the "parable of the square niche," a public highway project he worked on with a contractor who insisted that attractive, round utility niches be made square, even if they required extra reinforcing and were more expensive, because "they looked cheaper," and public money was being used on the project.

"While it is important not to add frivolous cost to publicly-funded projects, better-designed projects often save money and can produce much better final results," Kruckemeyer asserted. He demonstrated how a creative approach to the design of common urban elements such as bridges, expressways and parking garages can result in attractive facilities which are a source of community pride instead of necessary evils. A design process which includes aesthetics as a fundamental requirement, not a decorative afterthought, can be cost effective as well, as it often results in a reduction of labor and materials during construction and may inspire financial participation by the private sector.

In conclusion, Kruckemeyer argued that a mayor's leadership is essential in convincing public works personnel, consulting engineers and others involved in the process to let go of traditional ways of doing things and to open the design process to new possibilities. To encourage community participation in these programs, he asserted, mayors are justified "even in spreading rumors that are worse than the truth." ■

Ken Kruckemeyer makes a point at the U. S. Conference of Mayors

(Las Vegas, continued from page 1)

Las Vegas Mayor Jan Jones

concentration of the downtown businesses, where pedestrian activity could be encouraged. The development on the Strip, it was noted, requires an automobile even for travelling from one casino to another. The mayor was also advised to try and bring together the downtown businesses which would gain from these efforts, but who traditionally competed against each other for their gambling business.

Since October of 1992 the city has been pursuing a bold new design for Fremont Street. "The Fremont Street Experience" proposes to cover a four-block section of the central downtown with a 100-foot high canopy. Designed by Jon Jerde, a Los Angeles-based architect, the new design would create an indoor-outdoor environment, or civic room, that would promote pedestrian activity, becoming a new attraction for tourists who might otherwise never make the trip downtown.

Jerde explains that "the core idea is to establish Fremont Street as an urban theatrical experience. In an abstract sense, the existing archaeology can be considered the stage proscenium, ready for the attraction—the performance which draws the audience. To this stage comes the *Celestial Vault and Sky Parade/Light Show*."

The project includes three components: the celestial vault, the sky parade and light show, and a new parking structure. The vault, 100 feet high and 1340 feet long, would span Fremont Street from First Street to Fourth Street with a lattice skin covered with reflective materials to provide both sparkle and shade during the day and a dazzling canopy at night. Supported by columns alternately spaced at 140 or 240 feet, the vault will create a pedestrian environment with limited vehicle movement along Fremont Street from Main Street to Las Vegas Boulevard.

The Celestial Vault is designed to unify the individual casinos into a grand concourse, along the length of which the sky parade will suspend enormous floats, dramatically lit, creating "the sky parade—dancing, floating, acting, singing forms of light and reflection suspended above the viewer—approaching from afar to pass overhead and disappear in the distance." The urban theater complements the visual excitement of the casinos with a design that is uniquely Las Vegas. Proposals for illuminated floats in the sky parade include enormous roulette wheels, cowboy boots and playing cards.

To complete the plan a parking structure, designed to add a block of retail business on Fremont Street, will provide 1,500 parking spaces, an important component of the urban design plan.

Mayor Jones has succeeded in getting the businesses along Fremont Street to work together on the $60 million development, the first step for any successful downtown plan. With Jerde she has also succeeded in finding a plan for the city which, in the words of Robert Campbell, "may really work for Las Vegas. The city is already a man-made, artificial environment, so this design proposal needn't create the kind of problems it might in another city. It could be an exciting new kind of public space for the kind of activity that downtown Las Vegas attracts."

The city council has approved the design and the Downtown Progress Association is putting together funding for the project. Composed of the businesses which will benefit from the project, the Downtown Progress Association will fund construction of the Celestial Vault/Sky Parade and maintenance costs. Public funds will pay for the parking garage and street improvements, while a proposed room tax will pick up construction costs not already met.

Although many issues remain to be settled, the city is pushing forward with Jerde's design proposal. The mayor has taken a strong role in negotiations for the project and with her leadership the ambitious plan may yet be realized.

"As a city, we are very excited about the possibility of this project becoming a reality for downtown Las Vegas and believe that it will enhance the area and fulfill the intent to create a Premiere Urban Spectacular," says Mayor Jones. ■

Model of Celestial Vault and Sky Parade on Fremont Street

MICD: XIV
March 1993

University of Virginia

RESOURCE TEAM

Warren Boeschenstein
architect

Alan Brangman
Design Arts Program

John Clark
developer

Allan Jacobs
city planner

Carol Johnson
landscape architect

Dennis Jones
architect/computer engineer

Jerold Kayden
land use attorney

Kenneth Kruckemeyer
architect/civil engineer

Mayor Joseph Riley
Charleston, SC (keynote)

Jaquelin Robertson
architect/urban designer

Patricia Wilson
preservationist

MAYORS AND DESIGN PROBLEMS

Mayor Barbara Bohannan-Sheppard, Chester, PA: How can a proposed industrial highway aid efforts to bring industry to the city without destroying residential neighborhoods or isolating the city from the waterfront?

Mayor David Bowers, Roanoke, VA: A proposal to link the historic Hotel Roanoke, separated by train tracks and elevation, to downtown with an enclosed glass tunnel. Can the city find better links between the hotel, a museum and a farmers market?

Mayor Tommy Olmstead, Macon, GA: The city wants to improve the area around a new Music Hall of Fame. Questions concern visual links along a highway exit, creating a new park and closing a street to create a pedestrian mall.

Mayor Aaron Thompson, Camden, NJ: How will a comprehensive plan help the city promote its vision of the future and negotiate with private enterprises that have their own plans for the city?

Mayor Patricia Ticer, Alexandria, VA: How can the city fight for the kind of development it desires in Potomac Yard, a site which connects the city to northern Virginia and is owned by the state. What will be the result of current zoning and density levels?

Mayor William Ward, Chesapeake, VA: The long-term results of uncontrolled growth in a city with enormous land area, but lacking a central core. Can this growth be channeled into an old neighborhood?

Mayor Gloria Webb, Portsmouth, VA: Identifying appropriate development for two empty parcels of land on the city's waterfront close to downtown. The city wants to promote residential neighborhoods on the sites.

MICD: Northeast
April 1993

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Adele Fleet Bacow
economic development

Alan Brangman
Design Arts Program

Robert Campbell
architectural critic

Rick Chellman
transportation planner

Mayor Cardell Cooper
East Orange, NJ (keynote)

Walter Cudnohufsky
landscape architect

Deborah Darden
environmental planner

Robert Fishman
urban historian

Dennis Frenchman
architect/urban designer

Michael Kwartler
architect/urban designer

David Lee
architect/urban designer

Mark Schuster
city planner

Roger Simmonds
architect/urban designer

Mayor Paul Bucellato, Poughkeepsie, NY: What will restore the city's relationship to the Hudson River? Urban renewal has eliminated everything along the riverside except a train station, a high-rise housing complex and a park.

Mayor Almeda Dake, Saratoga Springs, NY: An attractive downtown has become too gentrified and tourist-oriented for residents' needs. How can urban design tools, such as design guidelines, improve and beautify the strip development where most citizens actually shop?

Mayor Alfred Del Vecchio, White Plains, NY: How can the city encourage street life and help retail businesses on a main street trying to create a distinct identity and compete with enormous shopping malls located in the downtown?

Mayor Robert McKenna, Newport, RI: Pedestrian access across a four-lane roadway that has bisected the commercial and waterfront sections of downtown, separating tourist stores from scenic attractions.

Mayor Lee Namey, Wilkes-Barre, PA: Promoting downtown retail business. Are the parking garages and covered walks which were added to help downtown compete with malls now hurting the area?

Mayor Theodore Pelosi, Haverhill, MA: The city is separated from the Merrimack River by a flood wall and several vacant buildings which turn away from the river. How can these buildings become links to the river, instead of barriers?

Mayor Judith Robbins, Attleboro, MA: Discussion of a plan to convert two riverfront mills into housing and a jewelry outlet mall. How will this plan spur revitalization of the city, which has too much surface parking and is bisected by a railroad.

Mayor Joseph Vas, Perth Amboy, NJ: How can the city revitalize its downtown, which contains a waterfront ferry building, a train station and successful locally-owned retail shops, without losing its distinctive character.

ALUMNI NOTES

Mayor Vincent Schoemehl (MICD: Spring 1988) is pleased that MICD: Midwest is coming to **St. Louis, MO**. Washington University will host the next three regional institutes, which will be coordinated by John Hoal, after being chosen by a Design Arts panel which reviewed proposals submitted by universities across the midwest.

Mayor Schoemehl believes that having the program in St. Louis will provide "an opportunity for me to share with other mayors my experiences and some of the successes we have had through urban design review. . . From major new projects to the city's many historic neighborhoods, design quality has been an important factor in my administration."

■

The Southeast Gateway Council is a non-profit corporation recently set up in **Winston-Salem, NC**, to oversee the redevelopment of an area of vacant commercial buildings into a vibrant, well-designed neighborhood. **Mayor Martha Wood** (MICD: South 1990) supports the plan recommended by a team of architects and urban designers who visited the city last fall.

The plan also has impressive support within the community, which includes three colleges and Old Salem. "It is a broad coalition," notes Mayor Wood. "Whenever you have citizen support that includes all these different entities, it's a strong statement of what the community thinks is important."

PHOTO CREDITS:

Page 1 - Kenneth Kruckemeyer, *Daniel Grogan Photography*

Page 2 - Mayor Jan Jones, *Office of the Mayor* The Fremont Street Experience, *The Jerde Partnership, Inc.*

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Mayor Robert Markel (MICD: Fall 1992) recently attended a forum of Design For Housing, a program sponsored by the Design Arts Program and the American Institute of Architects which helps city leaders focus on housing issues.

"The opportunity to have public officials interchange ideas and discuss issues which affect design, neighborhood planning and housing affordability helps stimulate purposeful public policy," says Mayor Markel.

The delegation from **Springfield, MA**, focused on Franklin Street, a neighborhood with serious social problems. The city has received a $50,000 grant from the Massachusetts Housing Partnership to concentrate planning in the area based on the ideas generated during the forum.

■

Mayor Patricia Hilligoss (MICD: West 1992) presented a redevelopment area in **Petaluma, CA**, which became a course project for graduate students at the University of California, Berkeley. The project included an analysis of downtown Petaluma's structures, group visions of pedestrian-scale development and design proposals for specific sites.

At the end of the course, the students exhibited their work at a public presentation in Petaluma which allowed citizens to envision their downtown in new ways.

In April, the Second Annual Livable Communities Conference in **Meridian, MS**, featured sessions focusing on community quality and architecture, building consensus and aspects of local government and affordable housing.

"We are very proud of this conference," says **Mayor Jimmy Kemp** (MICD: Fall 1988). "It gives us the opportunity to share ideas that can make our communities richer, more vibrant and, ultimately, truly livable places for people."

Speakers included Jan Gehl of the University of Copenhagen; Rod Hackney of the Royal Institute of British Architects; Elinoar Barzaachi, a city engineer from Jerusalem; Peter Brink of the National Trust; and **Mayor Juanita Crabb** (MICD: Fall 1986) of **Binghamton, NY**.

■

Mayor Douglas Palmer (MICD: Spring 1992) has made progress on the issue he presented at the Institute, the Delaware & Raritan Canal which runs through **Trenton, NJ**.

"Instead of this no-man's land which acts as a barrier and fragments the community, we're looking at the canal to become a kind of connecting tissue to the neighborhoods," says Allan Mallach, director of housing and development for the city.

During the winter, the city sponsored a series of community meetings which began to set priorities for improvements, with $4.5 million in funding to be spent. In March, the city went back to residents to discuss design alternatives and is now working on the final strategy.

But Mallach sees this as just the beginning. "We really want to use the planning and redevelopment process as kind of a community-building process."

CALENDAR

June 18–22, 1993	U.S. Conference of Mayors, New York, NY MICD Alumni Breakfast *(June 20)*
October 14–16, 1993	MICD: XV, University of Virginia Charlottesville, VA
October 28–30, 1993	MICD: Midwest, Washington University St. Louis, MO